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ABSTRACT

Based upon the experiences of Delgado Community College (DCC), this series of presentations examines the use of needs assessment as a planning tool. After explaining the way needs assessment is defined at DCC, Carol Hopson discusses the decisions to be made before beginning a needs assessment with respect to: (1) institutional willingness to abide by assessment results; (2) program priorities; (3) budgeting for costs such as printing, computer time, and consultants; and (4) the assignment of staff, including faculty members, to the project. Next, Margaret Montgomery describes the methodology of DCC's needs assessment, which involved the specification of purposes, goals, and objectives by the Educational Planning Staff; the development of a time line; the collection of data from target populations using structured questionnaires (i.e, an educational interest survey, a business and industry survey, a high school survey, and an 8th grade survey); the analysis of data; and the preparation of a written report for policy makers. Then, Gary Aspiazu discusses the role of DCC's advisory committee in fact finding, plan development, and mobilization of public support; describes the formation and selection of the committee; and suggests ways of reporting and publicizing an advisory committee's work. Finally, Elton M. Lagasse illustrates the way in which the results of DCC's needs assessment were used in discontinuing, modifying, and adding programs. (LL)

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The Needs Assessment As A Planning Tool for the 1980's

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Presented at the annual convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, April 24-27, New Orleans, LA.

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OVERVIEW

The needs assessment can be a valuable planning tool for the 1980's as more community colleges face the problems of tighter budgets, changing programmatic needs, and accountability to boards, faculty, students, and the communities served.

In the next hour and half, we hope to share with you our experiences and findings concerning the usefulness of the needs assessment in both programmatic and campus-wide decisions. I will attempt to discuss the preliminary decisions that lead to a needs assessment, the financial aspects, and the internal staff.

Margaret Montgomery, Director of Faculty and Staff Development, is going to describe the methodology which has been developed from both our experiences and our research. Gary Aspiazu, Director of the Delgado Development Foundation, will point out the significance of an advisory committee in conducting a needs assessment and in following through on their recommendations.

Finally, Elton Lagasse, the Director of Non-Traditional Programs, will provide insight into how the results of a given needs assessment can be used in building relationships with business and industry.

Keep in mind that what we share here with you is based primarily on our unique experiences at Delgado Community College. Only you can determine your own needs and how they can best be met.

In preparing for this forum, we had difficulty in deciding whether to discuss basic decisions, finances or staffing first. We all know the importance of adequate funding in accomplishing any project, but u[illegible] you have the right people, all the money in the budget cannot produce a good needs assessment.

Several years ago, a new administration came to Delgado. It was the culmination of many years of change that saw the school go from a boys' trades school to a vocational school, to a technical institute, to a junior college, and finally to a community college. All of this change produced much confusion over identity. The assessment of who we were, where we were going and who were we attempting to serve became immensely important questions and an assessment of needs became vital. The task of assessing needs fell to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost. Many different and unique types of assessments have been undertaken, but all have included input from the Educational Planning Staff. This group roughly reflects the staff of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and includes different individuals for different needs. However, both faculty and administrators serve on this committee.

Carol S. Hopson

STAFFING, FINANCING AND DECISION MAKING

In beginning my presentation this afternoon, I will share with you the definition of a needs assessment as we have used it in our experiences. First, a need is that which exists between "what is" and "what ought to be." Therefore, if what you desire is a campus of 1,000 students pursuing a program in music for which 1,000 jobs are available and you have a campus of 1,000 students pursuing a program in music for which 1,000 jobs are available, you are achieving your goal and no unmet need exists. However, if there are five computer manufacturing firms being built in your area requiring 500 to 1,000 skilled technicians and there are no computer technology training programs, the need for skilled "person power" exists and there is an unmet need. Also, if there are five major hotels closing in your area due to a lack in tourism, and you have been graduating 60 to 70 people a year in hotel/motel management, the unmet need will be in available jobs for these graduates. Thus, a needs assessment is a study undertaken to determine if there is any unmet need between the current status and the stated goals of a business, industry, individual or school. The difference, once identified, can be met, or at least partially met, through the implementation of new programs, modified programs or even the elimination of programs.

Usually a needs assessment occurs when one is required as part of a grant for receiving federal funds or if the institution perceives the need to assess programs in anticipation of change. Many of the early needs assessments were conducted as part of the United State Department of Education mandate to show need as a requirement for federal funding in various programs. These assessments usually were concerned with proving the number of eligible participants for a program. As an example, let me mention the Upward Bound Program. For a college to be eligible for these funds, it must show a need; that is, the school must prove that there are sufficient numbers of students with financial need and whose parents have not

attended college. These are primarily numbers in need. Today needs assessments have developed to include the number of student stations required in a given program, the areas of instruction most sought by students, the manpower needs of a community and much more.

Prior to initiating any needs assessment, be it the review of one existing program or the establishment of an entire new campus, certain decisions must be made. These determinations will be significant in the use of the outcome of the assessment.

The first major decision must be that the college and the departments affected by the particular needs assessment will be willing to abide by the results. Otherwise, there is no need for the study. If the needs assessment is conducted to determine the usefulness of a program in high technology and the school is dedicated to offering only liberal arts, it would be a waste of finances and energy to conduct such a study.

A second decision is necessary, but is not as easily resolved as the first. In determining the need for programs, particularly on a large scale, it is obvious that priorites must be established. These should be set at the beginning The first priority would of course be to include programs with high potential-student interest and high business/industry need. But once the programs meeting the first priority have been selected, the decisions become more difficult. This table shows the various possibilities that can be considered.

Priority	Student Interest	Business/Industry Need
1st	High	High
2nd	Medium	Medium
3rd	Low	Low

Priority	Student Interest	Business/Industry Need
1st	High	High
2nd	Medium	Medium
3rd	Low	Low

Priority	Student Interest	Buiness/Industry Need
1st	High	High
2nd	Medium	Medium
3rd	Low	Low

Later in this presentation, Gary Aspiazu, is going to speak on the importance of the Advisory Committee. Here is an example of how important the role of the Advisory Committee can be. Some years ago, I worked on a study to establish new vocational programs. The advisory group was composed primarily of people concerned with meeting the existing needs of local industries. The result of this was the priority for programs was based on the manpower needs only and often no student interest existed. Thus, many programs were planned and facilities built to accommodate large numbers of students and only a handful of students responded. It is essential, that programs be balanced between student interest, community needs, and manpower needs.

Once the decision is made to do a needs assessment and those in charge have determined how priorities will be set, then it is necessary to determine how the study will be financed and who from the institution's staff will be assigned to the project. As you will learn from the other panel members, the costs for conducting a needs assessment may vary greatly. Some programmatic assessments cost no more than the normal salary paid to the staff person or people conducting the study, others may cost well over 100,000 dollars, particularly if external consultants are involved. The major cost categories are: printing and duplicating, mailouts, computer time, external consultants (if needed), and the final report. If your needs assessment is for internal use only, you may decide that the final report will be a simple typed copy, xeroxed and distributed to the policy-makers. If wider distribution is desired, more time and effort should be put into a printed final report. We have copies of one final report with us to share with you.

In all cases, a needs assessment study should be planned around a carefully prepared budget. Since a needs assessment is often a tool of accountability, it should itself be accountable.

The staff for a needs assessment should be varied. The four of us here today have very different backgrounds, abilities, and interests and yet we are all part of a team that comes together to serve Delgado. Elton is active both in business/industry relations and politics and he is often able to help groups focus on the needs for change. Gary is continually working with individuals for the Delgado Development Foundation, Margaret is an educational planner in addition to directing the faculty and staff development program. My primary responsibilities at the college are to teach the oral communication courses, so needless to say, my contribution to the planning staff is often in the area of communication, as well as educational planning. Two other members of the staff should be mentioned-the Director of Curriculum Development and the Vice President of Academic Affairs, both of whom are frequently involved in these undertakings.

You will learn from the later presentations that we are all active participants in each major needs assessment study, whether or not external consultants are part of the team. Our weak area is in the computer area. We often rely on others to computerize our data, but even then, we are in a position to request the format for data usage.

Sometimes, institutions are reluctant to use faculty in non-teaching situations. Yet, if you choose wisely, this can be a happy relationship for all concerned. Faculty who are a part of the data gathering, analysis, and implementation of results of needs assessment are usually more supportive of administrative policies because of their involvement. In a cost conscious time, it also can help eliminate heavy external consultant costs, if feasible.

I have told you that my field is communications. Therefore let me conclude my

segment of this forum with a message. Remember that in almost every case two way communications is best. If a school is to conduct a successful needs assessment, good communication is essential. The faculty and staff should be aware of what is taking place. There should be channels to the top as well as from the top. One way to sell your ideas is to sell one group on your purpose and have them approach other groups. At each level of the study make plans for gathering feedback from those concerned, faculty, potential students, businesses and industries, and the community to be served.

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

For many years community college administrators and planners have made decisions for providing specific programs and services based on past experiences, intuition, or political influences. Since, it appears that the 1980's will be a decade of financial retrenchment for educational institutions and business alike, it is imperative that community college leaders as well as 4 year college and university administrators move from subjective decision making to planning programs and services based on a readily available, valid community based data. As early as 1968, R.L. Sweigert, stated that data from a study of the community's educational needs should enable any legally responsible policy--making body to establish priorties among needs, thereby giving direction to educational planning.[1]

In an attempt to contend with the current financial situation, while at the same time make sound administrative decisions relating to educational planning, Delgado Community College utilizes the needs assessment as a planning tool. To date, the use of this tool (Needs Assessment) has proven to be the most successful when we've implemented a carefully planned methodology.

The following methodology, or approach, is the result of countless hours of research, reviewing published goal inventories, questionnaires, community awareness surveys, falling down and skinning our knees and getting up again. This methodology was designed to fit the needs of Delgado Community College yet it could well be used as is or modified to fit the needs of any institution that is unique.

Generally, a needs assessment is coordinated by a central office. At Delgado Community College it is through the office of the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost. The needs assessment activities are carried out by the Educational Planning Staff (EPS). Which consists of Delgado faculty and staff possessing the expertise needed to carry out a study of this nature. Although activities of a needs study are primarily the responsbility of EPS on occasion external consultants are retained to work in conjunction with the staff.

Specifying the Purpose, Goals and Objectives

In the beginning phase of the needs assessment, the purpose, goals and objectives or special concerns must be made clear. The following questions should be addressed as a means of putting things in their proper prospective:

- What types of needs are of concern and for whom?;
- What data are to be collected and why?;
- And how are the assessment data to be applied or used? [2]

Each of these questions relates to institutional goals and/or program/goals, therefore identifying and reaching agreements about current and potential institutional and program goals is an important part of the process. The Educational Planning Staff determines the activities necessary to conduct the needs assessment and develops a timeline in which these activities should become completed Once the institutional or program goals relating to the needs assessment are identified and the overall goal of the needs assessment is established, which in most instances is to determine the feasibility of: 1) maintaining, 2) restructuring 3) cutting back or eliminating and 4) possibly expanding-programs curriculum or even a campus. Most timelines are based on a three to six month time frame. (Figure 1)

Included in the scheme of needs assessment activities is the establishment of an advisory committee which is important in any type of needs assessment, regardless of its purpose. This advisory committee works closely with the Educational Planning Staff, and serves, to some extent, as a secondary or informed data source.

It can also be considered a primary data source, but basically your primary data will come from the target population. Additional data can be obtained from documents which our local Chamber of Commerce and the Louisiana Deparment of Labor Statistics have been very helpful in providing. These include current reports-census information, population projections, and manpower studies. We also gather student enrollment projections and in some instances, transportion studies have been provided by the Regional Transit Commission.

To obtain data from the target population, after reviewing many of the already available survey instruments and techniques, the Educational Planning Staff decided to use the structured questionnaire. (See figures 1 and 2).

This method was selected above others, such as personal interview or telephone surveys (although we have used a telephone survey when the target population was very small) because it is easy to administer, allows for quick tabluation and the presence of the researcher will not bias the results. The questionnaire in Figure 2 was developed by the Educational Planning Staff. The majority of the questions are multiple choice. The questions are designed to gather general demographic information about the population and attempts to give the researchers some insight as to what the educational needs and interests are, as well as career interest. Figure 3 is a list of career choices. This list included on the questionnaire so that a comparison might be made between the responses and current manpower needs. The hobby area is included as a basis for providing our community services division with information to aid in its program planning.

This one questionnaire, while the information remained comparable, has been modified and used to obtain data from four populations in various needs studies. In the recent St. Tammany Parish needs study, which was to determine the feasibilty of bringing community college offerings to this area the following surveys were conducted.

An Educational Interest Survey-was administered to a population consisting of out-of-school young adults, women at home, senior citizens and working adults. This group was surveyed to determine its educational needs and interests. Survey instruments were distributed in person. On another occasion this instrucment was used and the population was randomly selected by census track;

A Business and Industry Survey-was mailed to the population consisting of businesses/industries that are members of the Chamber of Commerce to determine various training needs;

A High School Survey-was administered to selected eleventh graders at selected high schools because this group was nearing the entry point of college and the responses would indicate the choices this group would select and;

An Eighth Grade Survey-was administered to eighth graders at selected schools because current projections showed this would be the first group to enter a new proposed campus if one were to be located in the area. Additionally, surveying this group often generates thinking about the future.

Once these surveys are completed and returned a computer analysis is done. For the St. Tammany Parish study the computer analysis was done internally by the Educational Planning Staff and for a previous study (Kenner/Harahan) the analysis was conducted partly by the EPS and partly conducted by an external consultant. The analysis is then put into a written report, which is submitted to college administrators and other policy making bodies.

As one who has been activily involved in needs assessment studies, there is a point which I'd like to leave with you, no study is complete until the findings and recommendations have been implemented.

Figure 1

HIGH SCHOOL INFORMATION QUESTIONNAIRE

DIRECTIONS: Information is being obtained for improving educational opportunities available to this Parish. Your help is needed. Will you please help by answering each question appearing below. Read each question and each answer according to directions (most questions are to be answered by placing the letter of the answer selected in the space in front of the question). Answer each question as accurately and completely as possible. This is not a test, and the answers you give will not affect your grades. Neither your teachers nor other students will see your answers. DO NOT sign your name. Thank you!

____1. Sex: (Select one)
a. Male b. Female

____2. Racial/Ethnical Background: (Select one)
a. American Indian/Alaskan Native
b. Black
c. Asian or Pacific Islander
d. White
e. Hispanic Origin
f. Other_____

____3. Which high school program, or curriculum best describes the one in which you are enrolled? (Select one)
a. Business Education
b. College (Univ.) Preparatory
c. Industrial Arts
d. Trade & Industrial (T & I)
e. Agriculture
f. Home Economics
g. distributive Education
h. Other_____

____4. What grade are you in now?
a. 9th b. 10th c. 11th d. 12th

____5. How long have you lived in the area which this high school serves? (Select one)
a. Less than 1 year
b. 1-2 years
c. 3-5 years
d. 6-10 years
e. Over 10 years

____6. Do you at any time plan to continue your education? (Select one)
a. No
b. Probably not
c. Probably so
d. Yes, immediately
e. Yes, at a later date
f. Don't know

____7. If your plans include attending school somewhere sometime in the future, where do you plan to attend? (Answer only if your answer to question 5 was c, d, or e. Otherwise go to question 8.)
a. Four-year public college or university in Louisiana
b. Four-year private college or university in Louisiana
c. Two-year college in Louisiana
d. Vocational-Technical School or Trade School in Louisiana
e. Other
f. I don't know

____8. If you will "not" or will "probably not" continue in school after high school graduation, would you change your plans if you had more money? (Select one)
a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe
d. Don't know

____9. In which third of your high school class do you estimate your average up to the beginning of this semester would place you? (Select one)
a. Upper third (A to B Student)
b. Middle third (B– to C Student)
c. Lower third (C– to D Student)

____10. What will you probably do during the next year after high school graduation: (Select one)
a. Work on a full-time job for someone else
b. Attend school
c. Enter military service
d. Travel and see some things
e. Enter an apprenticeship to learn a trade_____
f. Run my own business
g. Work at home for parents
h. Become a housewife full-time
i. I don't know
j. Other plans_____

____11. What is your current family income? (Circle letter of your choice)
a. Under $15,000
b. $15,001-$20,000
c. $20,001-$25,000
d. $25,001-$30,000
e. Over $30,000

____12. Do you earn part of thee money you spend while attending high school by working on a part-time job during the school season? (Select one)
a. yes b. no

____13. Have you taken any high school courses in business, agriculture, trade or technical, distributive education, health, or home economics? (Select one)
a. Yes b. No

____14. In which of the following types of training or education would you have greatest interest after high school graduation? (Select one)
a. Continue going to school
b. Work for several years as a paid apprentice (helper) to learn a trade.
c. Enter military service for training
d. Correspondence study
e. On-the-job training with a company or industrial firm
f. None of the above

____15. If you had an opportunity to continue your education for one or two years after high school graduation at a comprehensive community college within easy driving distance of your home, would you probably do so? (Select one)
a. Yes
b. No
c. Maybe
d. Don't know

____16. Please read the list of occupations which follows. For your convenience, they have been grouped by categories. Indicate which of the listed occupations you eventually hope to follow by placing the number to the left of the selected occupation in the blocks below. Also select one choice from the Hobby Category.

1st choice ☐☐ (code number)
2nd choice ☐☐ (code number)
3rd choice ☐☐ (code number)

Hobby Interest ☐☐☐

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Figure 2

CAREERS

Code Number	Skilled Trades
01	Air conditioning/Refrigeration
02	Airline Host/Hostess
03	Auto Mechanic
04	Aviation Mechanic
05	Diesel Mechanic
06	Construction/Bldg. Contractor
07	Cook/Baker
08	Beauty Operator/Barber
09	Electrician
10	Electronics Repairman
11	Heavy Equipment Mechanic
12	Plumber
13	Seamanship
14	Welder

	Allied Health Services
15	Dental Technician
16	Hospital Administrator
17	Laboratory Technician
18	Licensed Practical Nurse
19	Medical Technician
20	Radiological Technician
21	Respiratory Therapist
22	Animal Medical Technology

	Business & Commerce
23	Accountant/CPA
24	Advertising & Public Relations Worker
25	Banker
26	Bookkeeper
27	Clerical Worker
28	Computer Operator/Programmer
29	Data Processor/KeyPunch Operator
30	General Business Worker
31	Hotel/Motel Manager
32	Insurance Sales
33	Manager-Business/Industry
34	Merchandiser (buy & sell)
35	Real Estate
36	Retail Sales
37	Secretarial Sales

	Government/Public Service
38	City Management
39	Fire Service/Rescue
40	Home Economist
41	Law Enforcement
42	Military
43	Politics
44	Recreation/Park Management
45	Social Worker
46	Teacher
47	Special Ed. Teacher

	Science & Engineering
48	Anthropology/Archaeology
49	Architecture
50	Astronomy
51	Biology
52	Chemistry
53	Ecology/Environmental
54	Engineering-Chemical
55	Engineering-Civil
56	Engineering-Electrical
57	Engineering-Industry
58	Engineering-Mechanical
59	Geology
60	Meteorology/Weather Forecast
61	Oceanography/Marine Biology
62	Zoology

	Arts
63	Writer
64	Broadcasting & Radio/TV
65	Commercial Art
66	Dramatics/Theater
67	Modeling/Fashion Design
68	Interior Decorator
69	Journalism
70	Music/Choral
71	Music/Instrumental
72	Painting/Drawing
73	Photography

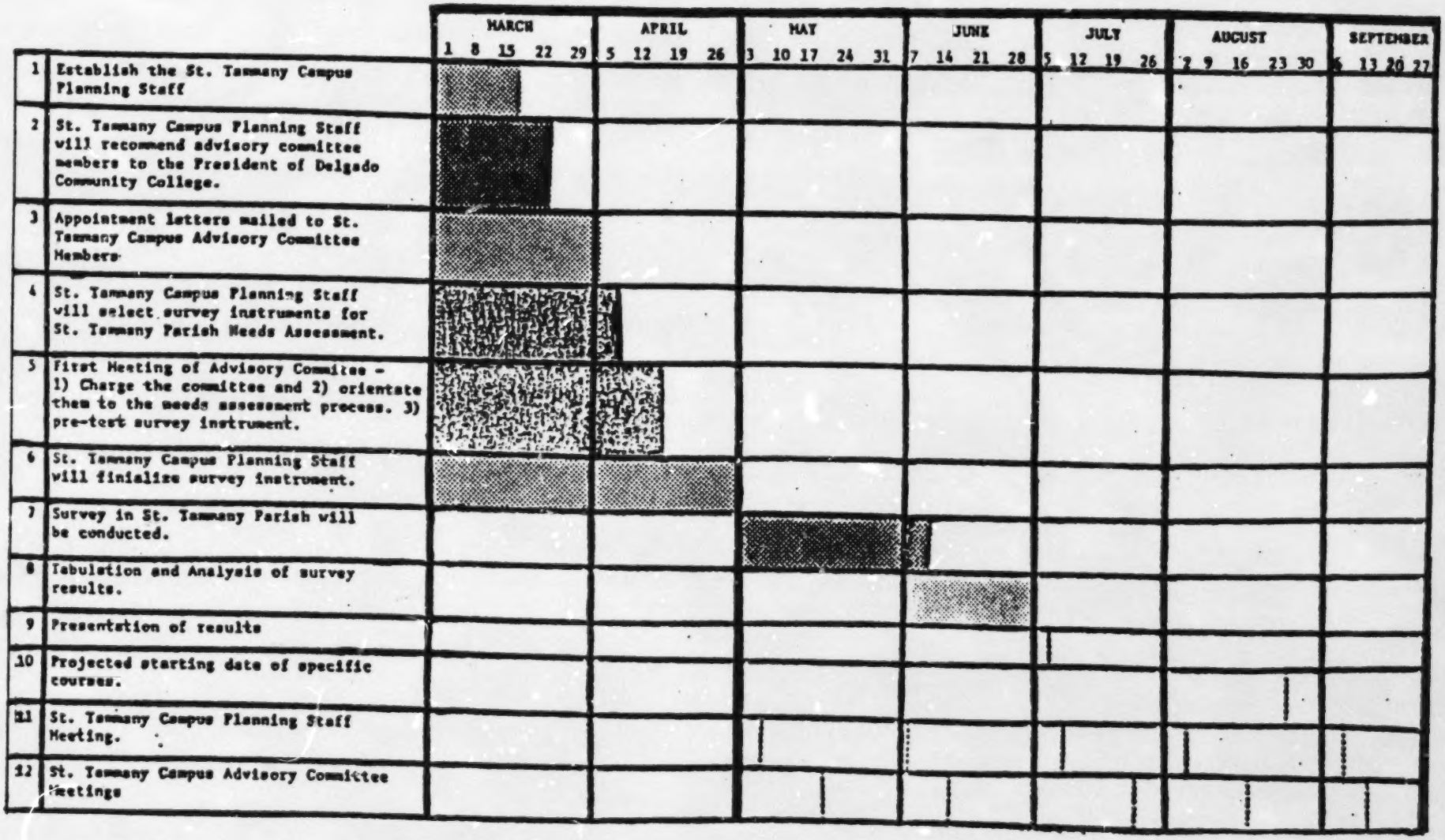
	Professional Areas
74	Agriculture (extension Agents) etc.
75	Business Administration
76	Scientist
77	Dentist
78	Forest Ranger
79	Government Serive Worker
80	Home Economist
81	Journalist
82	Lawyer/Attorney
83	Librarian
84	Medical Doctor
85	Minister, Priest or Rabbi
86	Musician
87	Nursing (Registered)
88	Pharmacist
89	Public Health Specialist
90	Social Worker
91	Teacher, Professor
92	Other_____ Write in

	Hobbies
093	Archery
094	Auto Sports/Road Rally
095	Bicycling
096	Bowling
097	Camping/Hiking
098	Canoeing
099	Dancing
100	Guns/Marksmanship
101	Horseback Riding
102	Hunting/Fishing
103	Motor Cycling
104	Music
105	Photography
106	Radio (Ham Operations)
107	Sailing
108	Power Boating
109	Swimming/Diving
110	Tennis
111	Scuba Diving
112	Jogging
113	Arts/Crafts
114	Model Airplanes/Cars/Trains

Figure 3

ST. TAMMANY PARISH

Needs Assessment Timeline


MARCH
1 8 15 22 29
APRIL
5 12 19 26
MAY
3 10 17 24 31
JUNE
7 14 21 28
JULY
5 12 19 26
AUGUST
2 9 16 23 30
SEPTEMBER
6 13 20 27
1 Establish the St. Tammany Campus Planning Staff
2 St. Tammany Campus Planning Staff will recommend advisory committee members to the President of Delgado Community College.
3 Appointment letters mailed to St. Tammany Campus Advisory Committee Members
4 St. Tammany Campus Planning Staff will select survey instruments for St. Tammany Parish Needs Assessment.
5 First Meeting of Advisory Committee - 1) Charge the committee and 2) orientate them to the needs assessment process. 3) pre-test survey instrument.
6 St. Tammany Campus Planning Staff will finialize survey instrument.
7 Survey in St. Tammany Parish will be conducted.
8 Tabulation and Analysis of survey results.
9 Presentation of results
10 Projected starting date of specific courses.
11 St. Tammany Campus Planning Staff Meeting.
12 St. Tammany Campus Advisory Committee Meetings

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Footnotes

[1] R. L. Sweigert, Needs Assessment: The First Step Toward Deliberate Rather than Impulsive Response to Problems, (San Franciso: U.S. Office Education, 1968), p.12.

[2] O. T. Lenning, "Assessing Students Program Needs." In P. Jadamus and M. W. Peterson and Assoc., Improving Academic Managment. A Handbook of Planning and Instructional Research. (San Franciso; Josey-Bass, 1980).

Gary Aspiazu

ROLE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

In discussing the advisory committee I will talk about its purpose, forming a committee. The functions, planning and the timetables. The committee at work reporting the results, and publicizing the work of the committee.

Purpose

We at Delgado Community College have found that the purpose for organizing an advisory committee is to initiate, review, and to comment on needs, plans, actions, and, of course, to make recommendations.

Advisory committees, reminded of their purpose and organized with that task in mind, can become an important instrument in dispelling public apathy toward any project.

To achieve their purpose, advisory committees usually function in three general ways:

1. Fact-finding-The committee seeks to obtain information and data regarding the current project. After committee members gather the facts and analyze them, they often draw conclusions and make recommendations.
2. Plan Development-The committee studies various plans, evaluates them in terms of the aspirations and goals of the community, and makes recommendations based on these findings.
3. Mobilizing Public Support- The committee engages in organized and systematic efforts to keep the community informed on the purposes and plans of the project.

Forming the Committee

There is no standard pattern for the formation of advisory committees. Size of the group, selection of members, type of organization, and methods of operation vary.

Advisory committees are formed in several ways. The method of formation and selection of members can have a great deal to do with the success of the committee and acceptance of its recommendations.

Size and detailed organization of the committee will depend a great deal on the purpose of the committee. It should be large enough to adequately reflect the community and provide a sufficient number of workers to perform the committee's function. It should also be small enough to encourage informal, efficient, face-to-face working relationships between members.

Most authorities recommend keeping the committee under 25 members, We have found that the ideal number to work with, taking into consideration that between 1/3-1/4 will not be able to attend any given meeting, is between 15-25 members.

As part of this presentation we have prepared a list for you of 16 possible categories from which to chose your committee members.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

An adivsory Committee of 15 to 25 members should be selected from the Academic Community, Business and Industry, Government, and Civic Groups. Members should be interested in education for people of all ages and have the required expertise and available time to devote to the project. Suggestions for types of individuals are shown below.

1. Public School Administrator
2. Public School Teacher or Counselor
3. Parochial/Private Schools Representative
4. Vocational and/or Business Schools Representative
5. Colleges/Universities Representative (if appropriate)
6. Public Welfare Agencies Representative
7. Public Health Department Representative
8. Medical/Dental Societies Representatives
9. Agricultural Extension Service Representative
10. Local News Media Representatives
    - Newspaper
    - Radio/TV
11. Cultural Area Representatives
    - Music
    - Drama
    - Art
    - Historic Preservation
12. Local Division of Personnel Employment Security
13. Business and Industry Leaders
14. Vocational Rehabilitation/Mental Health Association Representatives
15. Local Political Leaders (if appropriate)
    - Social/Civic Group Leaders
    - Community Representatives
16. Labor Representatives

It is important to note that any list of possible members should represent a cross section of the community. Every effort should be made to obtain geographic as well as economic, racial, political, and religious balance. Effort should also be made to have a balance of men and women on the committee.

Care should also be taken to include people who can provide leadership after the advisory committee is organized.

Regardless of its origin, every advisory committee should understand from the outset that its function is just what the name implies--advisory and not supervisory. While the planning staff is free to accept or reject advisory committee recommendations, they are not likely to take lightly suggestions made by a group which has done a good job.

Functions of the Committee

A set of guidelines or policies should be designed to ensure that the proper scope and function of the committee is clear to its members.

The guidelines should spell out the general purpose of the committee, areas of responsibility, method of organization, and its advisory role. It should be made clear to whom the committee's recommendation will be made and the possible action that may result from such recommendations.

There are no hard and fast rules for the organization of a committee. Officers should be selected by the committee members, to make sure the group functions in an orderly manner. A simple set of bylaws may be necessary, too, to spell out clearly the objectives of the committee, type of operation, and duties of the officers.

A committee established to achieve a long-range study may meet only monthly. Short-term committees will meet more frequently. To keep interest high and agenda compact, meetings of committees should not exceed two hours.

However, we have found that most of the people who have served on our committees are very busy individuals, therefore, we have determined to hold our meetings to one hour, if at all possible.

One of the most important steps to success, and sometimes most neglected, is adequate planning.

When the advisory committee is formally organized, its first job is to thoroughly plan exactly what it hopes to accomplish and how the goal is to be reached. One important tool during the planning stage is the development of a timetable. This pins down the direct responsibility of the committee, the time that will be allotted to each phase of the study, exactly what will be done, and when the final recommendations are to be completed.

A timetable also improves lines of communication with the planning staff and any outside consultants that may be required. It provides the news media and general public with a clear-cut schedule of meetings of the committee, which should always be open to the public.

The vital planning stage might occupy the first two or three meetings of the committee. It is time well spent. Good planning helps eliminate friction, possible misunderstandings, and uncertainty in the overall progress of the committee's work.

Committee at Work

All advisory committees are organized to assist in conducting a needs assessment and in planning the program. The work done by the committee members to carry out this project is as varied as the actual selection process.

At this point I will briefly comment on the work done by members of our Kenner/Harahan Campus Advisory Committee.

In the five months that it took to complete the needs assessment we met with members of the advisory committee for approximately six times. We felt that we had a very select group, a group willing to give of their busy schedules, and we respected that.

At each of our one hour meetings the planning staff and consultants made sure that the committee members were provided with some type of activity to elicit input from each one of the members.

The committee pre-tested all of our survey instruments--this made sure that the meetings were working meetings, and that each member felt that he/she were an integral part of the needs assessment, and each member was.

Reporting the Results

When the work of the advisory committee has been completed, the method of reporting the results to the proper people in the proper manner can have a great bearing on acceptance of the findings.

First of all, the report must be written to reflect the opinion of the advisory committee as a whole. The final report should contain a recommendation or recommendations of which the entire committee can agree.

A review of the final report should be the subject of a joint meeting of the planning staff and consultants. The results of the review should be discussed at a meeting of the entire advisory committee before the final report is published to the community.

Publicizing Committee Work

There is no reason to keep the activities of the advisory committee a secret. Before the committee is formed, the planning staff should inform the news media that such a committee is to be organized and for what purpose. Committee members' names should be included in the announcement. Committee officers should be indentified and hopefully photographed by the news media.

As the work of the committee progresses, frequent reports of its activities should be made public.

When the final report and recommendations have been presented to the planning staff, it is preferable to let the planning staff handle the publicity about the committee recommendations. It is also the responsibility of the planning staff to publicly describe what action it may take as a result of the advisory committee study.

The planning staff should also publicly disband the committee, with appropriate thanks and appreciation for the work and effort members have given toward the study.

In summary, the values and dividends obtained through an advisory committee are many. The advantages of forming an advisory committee to tackle difficult problems far outweigh the few dangers involved.

The many fruitful suggestions that have come as a result of committee work have been of great benefit to planning staffs, consultants, boards, and the local community.

Advisory committees create public awareness of the scope and intensity of the needs of the community. Recommendations of advisory committees help broaden public understanding and improve public attitudes toward education.

Needs Assessments

Following Through with Recommendations

Needs assessments can serve two major purposes; program review (modifications, deletions, and additions) at existing campuses and the establishment of programs and facilities at new campuses.

To acheive these purposes, one must not only define the goals of each assessment and tailor the design to produce the desired data but one must also implement the results of the needs assessment.

Delgado Community College has conducted a number of needs assessments which illustrate the methods of implementing an assessment. Several of these case studies are provided below.

A needs assessment was conducted of the orthotics and prosthetics program. This program had been federally funded and the institution was determing the value of continuing the program without federal funds. The assessment of the orthotics and prosthetics program revealed two major points: 1) no new jobs existed in the Greater New Orleans area for students in this field and, 2) students were unwilling or unable to relocate to states where jobs were available. Based on this informaion, the program was discontinued.

Similarly, an assessment of the plumbing program demonstrated a lack of student interest in the Delgado program. Both the local labor unions and many Vo-Tech schools were heavily involved in training programs for plumbers. Since Delgado's resources could be better used in other programs, plumbing was dropped as a program, but we continue to provide space for the union's apprenticeship program.

Community review of the college's programs have also led to modifications of Delgado's curriculum. An engineering task force was formed to assess the relevance of the curriculum in the engineering technologies. The results of the assessment confirmed that the calculus was an unneccessary requirement in several programs

and the programs were changed accordingly.

Another community review indicated a need for bio-medical equipment technicians in this geographical area. A needs assessment was conducted and can be used to illustrate the process necessary to establish a new program. The needs assessment itself was divided into three parts:

- The national group which certifies bio-medical technicians was contacted and information was obtained on the training and educational requirments for certification;
- Interviews were held with local hospital administrators to establish their requirements and needs for bio-medical equipment technologists and;
- Interviews were held with bio-medical technicians.

This assessment was completed within four weeks.

Once the needs assessment was completed, a curriculum was devised. This curriculum and the information from the assessment was presented to our governing board and approval was received to begin the program. The program is one of our current offerings.

Needs assessments using in-house staff are ideal when time is a critical factor. Delgado had the opportunity to use some "windfall" grant money to revitalize our printing program, but it was necessary to prove a need and establish requirements for equipment purchases. We designed a four question survey asking: How many printers do you hire annually? What type of equipment do you use? Have you ever hired a Delgado graduate? If so, are you satisfied with their work? The survey questionnaire was targeted to all printers listed in the yellow pages of the metropolitan phone book. The results not only demonstrated a continuing need for the program, but permitted us to buy the appropriate equipment. It also proved to be a valuable public relations effort. Several printers indicated a desire to attend Delgado or to send an untrained employee to the program.

While these examples were primarily short term, low cost efforts, needs assessments can be conducted over extended periods of time by in-house staff

to evaluate how well graduates fit into the business community, how business and civic leaders perceive the community college, and trends in training needs. The answers to these evaluations can lead to the revision of the immediate and long-term goals of the college.

Extensive and detailed needs assessments are especially important when establishing branch campuses. Delgado has considered the establishment of three branch campuses with mixed results. The first of the three campuses was to be located in New Orleans East. No advisory committee was formed to assist in the needs assessment. Since the site had already been choosen, the needs assessment focused on the mechanics of establishing a campus: space allocations, building designs, course offerings, and traffic patterns. The resulting was a 300 page book that could be a textbook example of organizing a community college, but the initial step had not been done. No data was generated on who and how many would attend, if the campus were opened. This, unfortunately, the assessment failed to ascertain the need for the campus. Without such evidence, and without support from a broad based advisory committee, it was extremely diffcult to obtain approval and funding for the campus. Even after approval was granted, the campus has been slow getting established. Everytime a program was to be offered, the lack of a proven need arose again as a stumbling block. The beautifully designed building has not been built.

The Kenner/Harahan and St. Tammany needs assessments were conducted differently and the results were considerably better. In both cases, advisory committees were formed consisting of political, business, civic leaders, and potentinal users from the appropriate areas.

With Kenner/Harahan, Delgado designed the questionnaire with an emphasis on the programmatic aspects of the proposed campus. We especially wanted to determine the curriculum needs of people in tne area. A consultant was hired to assist in the analysis of the result of the needs assessment and to make recommendations

concerning site selection and preliminary building design. The resulting report was presented to community leaders, the legislature, governing boards, and the local media. This established interest groups for us to contact when the campus was actually started (a process not yet completed) and allowed us to request funding from the legislature for start up costs.

The St. Tammany needs assessment was done entirely by the Delgado staff. Questions were designed to determine the types of courses desired and to determine the training needs of businesses. The questionnaire was handed out in selected shopping areas and mailed to selected businesses and residents of the area. In addition, students were surveyed to ascertain their goals for future education. From this information, a curriculum was rapidly developed and approved.

By utilizing the facilities of the St. Tammany Public School System, the campus was operating within six months of the beginning of the assessment process. Negotiations are now underway to purchase and renovate a building for a permanent campus. Seed money for this purchase has already been appropriated. The curriculum selected, based on the needs assessment, primarily business (accounting, typing, business law) and fine arts, has proved to be successful.

Finally, needs assessment must have clearly defined goals and be designed to acheive those goals in order to be successful. It is equally important, however, to take vigorous steps to implement the needs assessment. Without such implementation, needs assessments become an academic exercise instead of a vital part of the community college's curriculum development.

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